

A Comparative Study of Language Educational Policy in China and Western Europe

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Abstract. Nowadays, English has become a very important communicative tool for people from non-English-dominant countries. The Chinese government has been trying to push its residents to keep this pace for decades while recently most Western European countries try to avoid English teaching to protect their languages and cultures. Most Chinese students have to study English when they enter Grade 3. The College English Test Band 4 (CET4) has been the basic examination for Chinese students for decades and some universities will even require their students to pass CET6. Certificates of proving passing CET4 and CET6 will also offer help in job hunting. Recently, Chinese government even released the “Chinese culture go abroad” which aims to teach students how to spread Chinese cultures in English. For Western countries, Germany government want to protect their language and maintain the use of English at the same time while English academic writing continues to develop in Italy even these triggered severe debates. Now the Chinese government can see their reward after policies released for decades as it has become one of the strong competitors on academic area while the objectors in Western Europe are still working hard to defend their opinions. However, there are problems with policies released by the Chinese government as some teachers will argue that learning English cost a huge part of students’ time.

Keywords: English education; China; Western Europe.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has become an International language for different people from different countries or cultures to communicate with each other. For academic research, English has become a vital stage that makes teaching and learning important [1]. For improving academic competence in the world, the Chinese government invests many resources to help students and researchers to do academic research. To publish these outcomes and be recognized around nations, the Chinese government adopts a lot of policies to push both students and researchers who are not familiar with English to study it. Thus, English for academic purposes (EAP) is viewed more importantly by those who study and work in higher education institutions and surely it will keep this trend in the future.

Apart from this, English, in China, is the foreign language for most learners from early education to higher education. According to Gui, the amount of EFL learners in Chinese schools is about 200 million. Although in most places in China, English classes will not be set before grade 3, in some places like Beijing and Shanghai, children will start learning English in kindergarten. Meantime, in the amount of more than 44 million students in higher education in China, the majority of them have to accept English as a compulsory course. For those undergraduate students, they can’t graduate without passing the CET4 and they are not able to attend CET6 before passing the former exam. Moreover, when they hunt for jobs after graduation, certificates of high grades of CET4 or even CET6 will help them get a more reasonable job even if their career has little relationship with English and students don’t know what is such requirements for [2,3].

As for Western European countries, they face a rather complicated situation. Different countries treat English with different attitudes. As a language, English suffers fierce resistance in Italy and France because they consider it a threat to their national languages or even the cultures as they are trying to protect it [4]. Germany treats it less fiercely but is still not as welcome as China. However, at the same time, they have to set English medium classes if they want to compete with other

universities in the world ranking systems so that they can attract better candidates from other countries. Furthermore, now the U.S.A. and China are two strong competitors in the area of academic research. To defeat them or at least own their place in this area, their residents who work in higher education institutions must publish their outcomes in English to get recognition. Moreover, to help their students when competing with others in the global job market, English classes are also needed to improve their ability to communicate with people from different countries. Thus, although some researchers in France and Italy are strongly against learning English, it is not easy for them to stop students from learning it entirely because it is more like a tool in today's multilingual society.

Based on the above discussion, problems worth further deeper research can be seen. Therefore, in this essay, the policy related to English education adopted by Chinese and Western European governments will be introduced, the former in particular, to outline two kinds of different ways of treating it. The outcome led by those policies, including, benefits of policies to students, academic research outcomes and so forth as well as preferences of different policies on English education will be introduced in this essay. What's more, the results of the policies and the trend of future policies will be discussed.

2. Circumstances in China

English has become a lingua franca in the society of today in both private and academic areas. China is not the only country emphasis a lot on English. Similar policies and atmosphere also appear in Japan and Korea. These three governments pursue good outcomes related to English too much that Native Speakerism is even formed there which reflect in their English education policies, English teacher recruitment, and preparation for local English teachers [5]. Apart from this, the governments in East Asia tend to choose English teachers by following the same standard as America because they believe it is a good method for steady economic growth and more chances of moving into higher hierarchies for their residents. This leads to discrimination toward the local L2 speakers of English. According to Lin's experience in 2006, in Hong Kong, his program leader would rather choose a native speaker, who never managed to get a doctoral degree as he did, as a deputy programmer for a better outcome for their group [6]. Not knowing what his years-training in English was for, Angel expressed his anger at the start of the essay. This happened more than 15 years before while similar things never stop happening. In 1978, when China reopen to the whole world, English courses started to get attention years later CET4 become the very basic exam for undergraduate students who want to successfully graduate with certificates of degree. Because of this, the delay of CET 4 and CET 6 examinations in Shanghai province in the first half of this year caused by the epidemic situation leads to many undergraduate students' unsuccessfully receiving the certificates of degree which will become a hinder for their both later studying and working. Lots of students applied for postgraduate degrees both abroad and domestically but they will have to try again next year as they have no certificates of degree.

With the stricter and stricter policies adopted by Chinese governments, students' outcome seems never totally meet their needs. One of the big problems is the reticence of Chinese students in their English studies [7]. Although the exact meaning of reticence and if it can prove students' passive participation or have not reached a consensus yet, such phenomenon has been well observed through these years. One thing that can be sure is that, in general, Chinese students' capability in finishing tests is far better than their oral English. However, the English textbooks for elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools or even for undergraduate students are well designed as the policy required to provide content-based English education. Such policy has been kept for decades and is designed for improving Chinese students' ability in communicating with other in certain backgrounds. According to Fang Li's study, 30 out of 34 undergraduate students who received the questionnaire supported such a method of teaching and call it "killing two birds with one stone" [8]. However, this cannot stop the response in the textbooks to "How are you." which is "I'm fine, thank you. And you?" become a joke on the internet. Considering this problem with the English test attended by Chinese

students will help to find the answer as quite a few tests require them to speak fluently from primary school to high school and those oral English tests referred to in this period is rather simple and have little influence on their grades. Even when come to the undergraduate period, the speaking test of CET4 and CET6 is optional, meanwhile, the part of listening, reading and writing, and translating is the opposite. The speaking part will not influence their final grade as well.

Another problem is their effort paid to English and their unjust rewards. As mentioned above, there are about 200 million EFL learners in China. They are taking or have taken regular English courses, which means there are 4 class hours in a week, and 18 weeks in a term. 12 terms of English classes are accepted by high school students and 4 to 8 terms for undergraduate students in the universities [9]. These are the requirements written in the policies released by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China while some Chinese students will choose to take part in extra courses outside of school with not cheap fees to make sure they can acquire better grades in the texts. During these courses, they study the English words, phrases, and sentences related almost only daily basis rather than academic writing. Such circumstances lead to arguments around whether students should emphasize so much English or not. What is more important is that, even with such huge efforts, they still have to spend much money and time on their preparing for IELTS or similar kinds of tests [10]. This triggered a heated debate on the necessity of pushing Chinese students to learn English and doubts about the method of methods of how they are taught and how they learn. Until now, the number of students who choose other languages except English as their foreign language subject in one of the most important exams for most Chinese students- the College Entrance Examination is far fewer than those who choose English.

With the influence of China exceedingly increasing in recent decades, nowadays, students are not only asked to learn how to communicate with others in English backgrounds but also have to acquire the words and phrases of how to introduce Chinese cultures. In this way, the Chinese government expects Chinese students to spread traditional Chinese culture which first reflects in the exams like College Entrance Examinations, CET4, and CET6. While the capability of teachers to teach such content is worth doubting as their generations live in the decades when traditional Chinese culture was denied, meantime Western cultures were praised [11]. The necessity of such policies cannot be ignored. Nowadays with the increase in the wealth of Chinese people, lots of famous brands would like to design some products related to Chinese culture while they will not teach their shop assistants the background culture which will turn such a duty to the Chinese buyers. At that moment, surely it is a good opportunity to spread Chinese culture. It is doubtful whether it is the duty of Chinese teachers or English teachers to teach related background information about traditional Chinese culture as such policies have been long questioned its necessity and the objectors think students should pay more attention to the subject of Chinese instead.

3. Circumstances in Europe

English is now an imperial language worldwide which proves Churchill's speech at Harvard in the year 1943 when he expressed his belief of the UK and the U.S.A. leading the whole world now. It has become a threat to many languages and cultures which is the reason why most Western European countries are trying to set policies against it and protect their languages. They do have the necessity to worry about that as from 1945, English started to spread and until now it has created some new words in other languages such as Germany [12]. Though the harm of independence of European languages from English is still in some researchers' assuming while others choose not to believe or discuss it, the influence of English has not dropped much but still contains its importance. Although in some African countries, the governments now begin to pay attention to their dialects and less attention to English, it will not harm its importance in the academic area [5]. There is no doubt that English still has huge impacts on academic writing and many undergraduate students around the world have to learn English academic writing. In the year 2006, it is pointed out that several of the 'traditional languages of scientific communication' like German and French still contain their

position in the limited space, one of the existing ways is for communicative purposes within a particular scientific community. However, they are not as important as before around the nations even in humanities and social sciences. It is English that has taken their places in the function and become the international academic lingua franca. For example, data is analyzed from the year 1996 to 2011 which shows that the significantly quick increase in the number of English-medium publications has been in Italy. Meantime, a similar but slower trend appears in Germany and France. Whether slower or quicker, this is proof of success belongs to English spreading across Western European countries. Therefore, English is becoming the very language of publications in the academic area.

The German government has acted. During its 11th General Meeting on 22nd November 2011, the German Rectors' Conference passed a resolution on Language policy. It is said that such a policy was released to promote multilingualism and to protect German to make sure that it will remain a language of science and scholarship. Without obvious repulsive words towards English, it is still apparent enough when English is the very basic language when publishing academic outcomes. Based on such a background, it is not surprised the decision of the Politecnico di Milano which refers to the adoption of English in all the MA and Ph.D. courses beginning in 2014 led to heated debates among the supporters and objectors and even triggered a lawsuit. Some countries, like Switzerland, treat English as a rare language which is also a rare circumstance in Western Europe.

But the actual situation is, they can never truly diminish English studying in these countries or even reduce the English medium courses to a certain amount. Western European universities want to attract intelligent students from other countries which means they have to become world famous. A very useful method to reach such a goal is to get a good position in the world ranking systems and this will be a very good advertisement as these systems are famous and are read carefully by students from many nations. Setting English medium courses is one way to raise their position in such systems. Take China for example, many brilliant Chinese students who do well in their academic area may only acquire English as their second language or not so well in other languages except English and Chinese because of the policies introduced above. On such occasions, if the universities stop setting English medium classes this may stop them from applying to these universities which will bring loss to both universities and students. Furthermore, teaching English to their local students can give them more opportunities in the global job market as English is not only imperial in academic areas but also private life. This will surely improve the mobility of this group of students.

Thus, although some researchers in France and Italy are strongly against learning English, it is not easy for them to stop students from learning it entirely because it is more like a tool in today's multilingual society. That may be the reason why, even though the English medium courses have not been developed entirely in Italy which is a piece of good news for the objectors for learning English, universities are still making efforts to set more. It is doubtful that these objectors' efforts on against learning English or setting up English courses will let them be rewarded justly in the future.

4. Conclusion

In short, the two opposite policies share the very same background when the influence of English is too strong to ignore in the society of today. In the academic area, only published in English can win recognition around nations. Even on an almost daily basis, English is still needed to be acquired to help people from different countries and cultures to communicate and exchange information with each other. The Chinese government is still trying its best to fit in such circumstances by releasing different policies which emphasize the importance of English such as the necessity of passing CET4 for the Chinese undergraduate students. For most Chinese students, English is a compulsory course when they become Grade-3-primary students. From recent years they also have to learn how to introduce traditional Chinese cultures in English what is treated by Chinese government as a way to protect their own culture. While the Western governments try to protect their languages by diminish spreading and use of English. at the same time, they still have not succeed in doing so and some universities still have to set English-medium courses or even English-academic writing courses.

However, there is no doubt that no other languages can take English instead in the academic area yet or even in at least the next two or three decades. This means English will keep its position now soon. Thus, the Chinese government will probably continue its policies while the Western Countries may still have to struggle with such a dilemma. It is really hard to keep balance but these countries have no choice so both two kinds of policies are facing their dilemma. For the Chinese government, whether to push its students to study even harder or not is less important than finding a fitter way for Chinese students to learn English. Even the class hours required by the adopted policies are not a small amount, needless to say, many Chinese students have spent or are spending money and time on courses out of school but are unjustly rewarded. Arguments about the necessity under such circumstances are understandable. Whether the two sides will successfully find a suitable policy is still unknown but actually, both of them are trying to find the best solution.

So far, this essay has compared some different policies released by the Chinese government and Western Governments while systematic research base on the policies is still needed especially for the later. Not clear suggestion for those two trends of policies are given. For these two aspects there are so many things can be done.

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